

## BENNY HOLLAND

**SUMMARY:** Benjamin Holland, Executive VP of the International Longshoreman's Union talks to Pat Jasper about working his way up from a longshoreman to his present job, automation, technology replacing workers, segregations and the pension and welfare fund.

00:20

SEPT 09, 2011 at ILA Houston and Clearlake city

Benjamin Franklin Holland Jr known as Benny Holland. Born in Galveston, TX. Born in August 1942 to an Italian mother. Played all three sports. semi pro football and baseball. went to work on waterfront in 1960.

01:26

first few days on the waterfront was tough. Played sports and thought was in the best physical shape. Hold of the ship was 130 degrees F and had to stack a 140 lb. sacks of flour, 8-10 bags high. Realized was not in the best shape and was a very difficult job.

02:05

Worked as teams. Foreman would have regular crew. Was on the job learning experience. Was not in the union for the first 3 years. Earlier on family guys and union guys were hired first and outsiders were hired after that. Now hiring is based on seniority. Wife's father was a gang foreman and was included in his gang. Earlier on record was kept of the money made by each gang foreman and was turns to work was rotated. Could also go the pier and be recognized by other gang foreman and be hired. So could work more than 2-3 days a week. Wife's father was in WW II. His father was a longshoreman and brought him to the docks. Father in law worked on the docks as a longshoreman for 30 years.

05:31

All work was hand driven, no automation. Roll and stack, shovel grain.

06:16

Getting into the union was tough. (BREAK IN SOUND RECORDING)

07:08 (INTERVIEW BEGINS AGAIN)

Born in Galveston, TX. Played all three sports. Little League baseball at 8 years old. Played semi pro football and baseball and went to work on the waterfront at 1960. 18 yrs. old. father in law was gang foreman at the docks. Was taken to the docks during the summer.

08:45

First day was throwing 140 lb. sacks of flour. Very difficult. thought was in great shape but work proved to be difficult. Had to get acclimated to the heat inside the ship and also learn how to handle the sacks, tricks that were needed to do that. Everything was down by hand. More break bulk, cargo would come in on a pallet, 30 bags of rice or wheat would come in a bag. Had to take them off one at a time and stack them in a hold of the ship. Would do that for 8-10 hours a day. There used to be 4 men on each side, working each pallet. 2 men on each end of the sack.

10:26

Wife's grandfather was also longshoreman. Could not join the union for the first 3 years. Was working as extra labor. Gang foreman had a group of people that followed them and were hired on a regular basis and were not in the union, so whenever union men were not available, these individuals would be hired to fill out their gang. Rotated gangs on money. Could even find work 5-6 days a week. Made a lot of money the first summer at work. More money than father had made all year. Galveston was a piece work port. Worked cotton by the bale. Every bale in the hold of the ship was worth counted towards pay. Not uncommon to make \$80-100 in a day working cotton. Back in 1960 that was a lot of money. Cotton was the only piece work. Everything else was paid by the hour. Galveston is the number one cotton port in the world.

13:36

Money made in the first three months went towards a long career in the port. Started dating girlfriend in high school. Felt destined to be a longshoreman. So many opportunities to leave the waterfront but something always made him stay. First person to get into the union in three years and after that no one got in for the next 5 years. Was blessed and destined to be a longshoreman. Worked hard and had a good personality. Family connection did not help much. Established own personality and position. Loved to work cotton.

17:02

Loaded cotton. 15 man gang. 2 men running the wench, gang foreman signaling the wench-man, 4 men on the dock sending cotton into the hold. 4 men on end shore, 4 men on offshore taking these bales and rolling them into the hold to stack them. Work was so hard so had to alternate every two and half hours between dock and hold. Started working way up. Became a walking foreman. Walking foreman was at the end of ship and handled the working of the gang, kept track of tonnage. After that ran for office and gave up foreman's job and became assisted business agent, then Vice preside, then president and then secretary treasurer South Atlantic Gulf Coast in 1978. International VP in 82 and President of SAGC in 1990. Now, exec VP.

20:14

Strike in the 60s was about automation. Took the industry from "a hot body industry to a skilled industry." Knew automation was going to eliminate jobs. Stumbling block was the

International had established a guaranteed annual income. So that those who lost their jobs could get a certain amount of money per week guaranteed. long drawn strike. Lasted a 106 days. Union one and won the GAI package. Took a lot of years to make up three months salary. Management lost a few customers. Was not a win-win and have learnt from that. No strike since.

22:30

Was taught a lesson on how to be partners in the industry. How to not be adversaries. Common goal. All become partners regardless of the job role. While on strike for 106 days, did not get to work at all as had to be in negotiations or standing by for a meeting call at any time. Lot of people working on the dock went to work as iron workers and other odd jobs making some money, for almost 4 months. Was tough and was a great learning experience. Important to make things work rather than fight over things.

24:23

Most meetings were at the Galvesz Hotel in Galveston. Some were at the Helena hotel in Houston. Negotiating for the whole west gulf. Several stumbling blocks. Guaranteed annual income, wages and benefits. Knew were going to lose a lot of man hours due to the automation, protect pension fund, welfare fund, wanted to make sure men were compensated for the job loss. Took a 106 days because management was protecting their customers. Workers had to make sure their concerns were addressed. negotiations were tough, Both sides had strong points.

27:02

negotiating was really three layers. Buddy Raspberry was the spokesperson, 7 men negotiating with him. Bill Arnett and 7 stevedores. Were at the table constantly. In another room each local had representatives on the contract committee, each company had reps too. WGMA and USMX. Master contract.

29:00

No changes in the cargo. Don't see it because it all goes into containers. Still have cotton, bananas, cow hides, flour, rice. Only load containers onto ships, but do not see the product. With automation, cannot really employ anybody. Worker has to possess the skill set.

31:15

Two black locals that did deep sea work in Galveston, white local deep sea local. Then Hispanic local that loaded bananas. Loaded and unloaded ships but did so on a segregated basis. Government stepped in and said locals had to be integrated. Since worked the same identical jobs, could not be segregated and had to be integrated. Government stepped in because lawsuit was filed by one of the locals, a smaller black local called 329. Felt like they were not getting their share of the work. Locals felt that once merged they would all lose their identity and people would lose power because they would lose their position.

Fear of unknown, not fear of working with black people. Cannot be segregated in today's world. Hard because of the way the locals were merged. and how it was put together. Men with more experience got hurt. People with less seniority went ahead because they were dovetailed together and into the seniority program.

35:20

Merging of the locals. Judge Black, judge Garcia. don't think seniority system was fair. Judge had all the control.

37:49

Merged two cotton-head locals. Happens quite often.

38:48

Population of most locals is about a 100 or more. Clerks and checkers are mostly around 50. Clerks and checkers receive the cargo when it comes in and count the bags when they go on a ship. Keep tabs on the workers and make sure everyone's papers are in order, keep a note of wages. Management skill but done as union.

39:52

Describes job of clerk and checker.

41:30

all ships had a house in the middle where the crew stayed. 4-5 hatches on front of the house and 2-3 behind. Coin is flipped and one crew gets back and the other front. It is alternated from then on.

(PAUSE)

42:30

From lab perspective no competition between Galveston and Houston. From a port perspective there is little competition. Galveston used to be in the container business and used to compete against Houston. Did not work. Galveston shut containers down. Houston not successful with a few cruise ships, but Galveston is because Galveston is closer to the sea and makes more sense for cruise ships to load and unload in Galveston. Port is now a regional concept. magnify their advantages.

45:02

People higher up in office knew that a cruise channel for Houston did not make much sense, but elected officials in the union wanted a cruise ship terminal for their area.

46:24

Labor people have been on board. Some are very resistant. Should be on board. Was able to see both sides of the work. If furniture from Japan needs to be delivered to a store on

Westheimer, chain of events that move the product from A-B. Partnership needs to work collectively together.

49:30

Hardest thing to do right now is to educate members on how industry has changed. Could go into business earlier with just very little money. Cannot do that today. Return on investment is such that need to get more out of production.

52:10

Labor election. Have to be able to explain to people why some things cannot be done. Have to make people understand by putting things in their perspective. Workers need to understand that can lose this job tomorrow and they don't have the qualifications to get another job as good as this one.

55:11

When local unions can't take care of a dispute or when it concerns more than one port, when solving a grievance that sets a precedent for the whole port, get called in. Grievance machinery in the contract. Try not to have grievances. Most of them are about safety and work rules and are handled locally. Some affect the whole industry and then see work it out.

56:55

Story of a recent grievance. National grievance. In the contract, no supervisor will do work on collective bargaining agreement. In Savannah, had supervisors doing some clerk and checking work. With Automation, tend to take two jobs, one as a supervisor and another that is a union job. Resolved it. Share the work equally.

59:00

Scanners replaced labor. Cameras have replaced labor. Have negotiated keeping the job of a union person even it means teaching him a new skill instead of hiring someone new off the streets.

1:00:45

Strike was about automation. Mini Bridge. Plan was to put cargo in containers and take cargo from the Far East, bring it into the West Coast, take off ship in the west coast, distribute cargo throughout the United States by rail and truck. Cargo going to Europe would go all the way to the East coast to be put on a ship. Cargo coming from Europe would get distributed from the East coast. Would shuttle back and forth from East - West coast. Because of congestion to the rails and both the west and east coast, they began to utilize the Gulf. Had to compete with the coasts. Management had to figure out how to get cargo to the Gulf. "Had to survive because of what we did and not in spite of what we did." Had to compete and become partners.. Couldn't be individuals and win. That is why more partners in the Gulf region.

1:03:10

East and west coast colleagues are fine with it. Up in New York management is able to justify extra labor on ship as they cut back on trucking costs. Not so in Galveston.

1:05:03

Mini bridge was an industry thing. According to newspapers back then, worst job in the world was that of a longshoreman, since there were only going to be 3-4 major ports. That was not true. Have 30 ports.

1:06:20

One of the first container ships came in was SeaTrain. When containers really came in they were developed for the East and West coasts. Not really for Houston.

1:08:05

Widening of the Panama Canal is going to be a great asset for the Gulf. The thing that is going to help Houston is the fact that the population of Texas is growing. Ready markets in Houston Dallas and San Antonio will help the port a lot.

1:09:23

Number one job of labor representative is to negotiate an equitable contract for the men, and also one that keeps the employers in business. Second, have to be able to live up to everything that was negotiated on both sides. Also Chairman of the National Health Program, so have to make sure the program is fully funded, benefits are there, money is invested correctly. Sit on different committees.

1:11:51

in 1957, the pension and welfare fund - took 25 cents an hour out of a paycheck to develop the pension and welfare fund, men did not want it like that, they wanted it as wages. It was a difficult fight. Leaders then had to convince the men that this fund had to be set up. Today \$13.05 goes to the fund from a paycheck. Workers have full healthcare. Set up a healthcare program called MYLA. \$5 from every person working in the port goes to the fund and \$1 for every ton of automated cargo that is shipped goes into that fund. Fund costs \$350 million to operate, but have a surplus of at least one full year in reserve.

1:14:45

Love the work because there is something different every day. Not the same old stuff. Not an 8-5 job. Like helping people. It is rewarding. On the job experience was invaluable. Know exactly what goes on in the hold. Helps with negotiations. Everyday experience does not come out of a book.

1:19:19

Really admired Buddy Raspberry. Inspired by and learnt a lot of things from him.

1:23:21

Leaders of the segregated locals served together on committees - pension and welfare fund, negotiating committees. etc.

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